



**IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

**September 25, 2008  
For immediate release**

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## **DNR AND PUBLIC HEALTH RECEIVE GRANT TO STUDY BLUE-GREEN ALGAE**

**MEDIA CONTACTS: Eric O'Brien at (319) 353-2835 or  
Eric.OBrien@dnr.iowa.gov**

DES MOINES -- The Iowa Department of Public Health and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources have received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to study blue-green algae and its potential effects on human health.

Blue-green algae or cyanobacteria are naturally occurring organisms in the environment that perform many roles that are vital to the health of ecosystems. However, they may also cause harm through either excessive dense growth or release of toxins produced within the cyanobacteria themselves. The nuisance conditions that can be associated with cyanobacterial blooms are often influenced greatly by nutrient enrichment and climatic conditions.

"This is a topic that our departments have been very interested in and continually monitoring for a number of years," said Eric O'Brien who heads the DNR's beach monitoring program. "With the assistance provided from this grant we will be able to garner a better understanding of the dynamics of cyanobacterial blooms in Iowa waters and their possible connection with human health impacts."

The two departments will participate in an expanded surveillance program that will monitor blue-green algae blooms (cyanobacteria) at the state-owned beaches throughout Iowa and potential adverse health impacts from exposure to higher levels of blue-green algae.

This grant was obtained because the two departments made the monitoring of cyanobacteria and its associated toxins a priority over the last three years. In 2006, the DNR's Beach Monitoring Program began strategic monitoring for cyanobacteria. After three years, monitoring results showed lower levels of total toxins associated with cyanobacteria in each successive year. None of the samples from beaches taken during the summer and early fall of 2008 exceeded the World Health Organization's recommended safe level for recreational waters.

For the grant, the DNR will collect water samples at state park beaches and will analyze these samples for microcystins (a group of toxins produced by cyanobacteria). If elevated levels of microcystins are found, the Iowa Department of Public Health will track the incidences of human and animal reports of illness that could be attributed to exposure to elevated levels of blue-green algae. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will maintain this information in a database.

The Iowa Department of Public Health and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will receive \$118,488 for the first year of the program. The program is anticipated to continue for at least five years.

Additional details of the program can be obtained from: Stuart C. Schmitz, M.S., P.E., Environmental Toxicologist at the Iowa Department of Public Health by calling (515) 281-8707. Or, by calling (319) 353-2835 to reach Eric H. O'Brien, M.S., Environmental Microbiologist at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

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## **DNR SEEKS PUBLIC OPINION ON WASTEWATER RULE CHANGES**

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Courtney Cswercko at (515) 281-7206 or [courtney.cswercko@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:courtney.cswercko@dnr.iowa.gov)

DES MOINES – The DNR is seeking public comments on proposed changes to the rules governing wastewater discharges from all wastewater treatment facilities in the state.

People can comment orally or in writing on the proposed rules at three public meetings:

- 6 p.m. on Oct. 7 in the Fort Dodge Public Library Meeting Room at 424 Central Ave.,

- 7 p.m. on Oct. 8 in Room A of the Iowa City Public Library, 123 South Linn St., or
- 1:30 p.m. on Oct. 9 in the fifth floor conference rooms of the Wallace State Office Building, 502 East Ninth St. in Des Moines.

“The proposed rules will provide us with a better understanding of the pollutants discharged after wastewater is treated, which will be used to improve water quality,” said Courtney Cswercko, a DNR wastewater specialist.

The proposed rules would increase monitoring requirements for municipal and semi-public wastewater treatment plants. Municipal systems serve cities, and semi-public systems serve facilities like trailer courts, schools and campgrounds.

Monitoring for nutrient levels, including nitrogen and phosphorus, would also be added for municipal and semi-public facilities. The DNR will use the nutrient monitoring results to determine the amounts of nutrients entering streams from the plants.

Another proposed rule would give anyone the right to request a change in the permits that set pollutant limits for each facility. Also, changes are proposed in the reporting requirements for discharges of untreated or partially treated wastewater.

People can submit written comments by sending them to Cswercko at the DNR, 502 East Ninth St., Des Moines, IA 50319, or by email to [courtney.cswercko@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:courtney.cswercko@dnr.iowa.gov). The DNR will accept comments until Oct. 10.

For more information, view the complete rule proposal at <http://www.iowadnr.com/water/npdes/rulemaking.html>. Or, contact Cswercko by email or at (515) 281-7206.

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## **DELAWARE COUNTY RESIDENTS ASKED TO SHARE IDEAS ON IMPROVING SILVER LAKE**

**MEDIA CONTACT: Jeff Berckes at (515) 281-4791 or [jeff.berckes@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:jeff.berckes@dnr.iowa.gov) or Melinda Buyck at (515) 281-6113 [melinda.buyck@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:melinda.buyck@dnr.iowa.gov).**

DELHI – Iowans interested in improving Silver Lake in Delaware County can attend a meeting Oct. 8 to discuss and review a recent water quality study and its suggestions for improving the lake.

Silver Lake is on the state’s impaired waters list because excessive phosphorus has caused nuisance algal growth, pH, turbidity and ammonia violations within the lake.

The study, or DNR water quality improvement plan, looks at the problems and potential solutions for the problems in Silver Lake. It is designed as a guide for improving the lake for local resource agencies, partners, stakeholders and residents.

“The citizens of Delhi have been very active through the process of this study and have given us great input,” said Melinda Buyck with the DNR’s watershed improvement program. “We are excited to present them with this plan and help them take the next steps to move forward toward restoring the water quality of this lake.”

After a presentation of the water quality improvement plan, Iowans can provide their input at 6 p.m. at the Delhi City Hall, 316 Franklin St,

Staff from the DNR’s Watershed Improvement Program and Fisheries and Wildlife bureaus will also be on hand to answer questions.

Those not able to attend the public meeting can receive more information at [www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/tmdl/publicnotice.html](http://www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/tmdl/publicnotice.html). They can also submit comments on the plan by Oct. 27 by mailing Jeff Berckes, Iowa DNR, 502 E. Ninth St., Des Moines, Iowa 50319 or by emailing him at [jeff.berckes@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:jeff.berckes@dnr.iowa.gov) . Iowans can also ask questions of Berckes by calling (515) 281-4791.

After gathering comments, the DNR will forward the final plan, also called by its technical name of Total Maximum Daily Load, to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for approval. Local groups interested in helping Silver Lake can then use the plan to assist their improvement efforts.

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## **DNR INVESTIGATES FISH KILL IN DUBUQUE COUNTY**

**MEDIA CONTACT: Tom McCarthy at (563) 927-2640 OR**  
[tom.mccarthy@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:tom.mccarthy@dnr.iowa.gov)

EPWORTH – The DNR is investigating a fish kill that was reported late Sunday evening near Epworth, southwest of Dubuque.

DNR fisheries staff estimated there were 3,360 dead fish along about 7.4 miles of Whitewater Creek. The investigators were not able to determine a source of the fish kill south of Epworth on Monday. The DNR found mostly non-game fish with a few smallmouth bass.

“The person who reported this did exactly the right thing, but unfortunately when he found the fish they had have been dead for quite a while so it was difficult to find the cause of the fish kill,” said Tom McCarthy of the DNR’s Manchester field office.

Anyone who finds dead fish can help in the investigation by calling the DNR 24-hour spill line immediately. The number is at (515) 281-8694.

The DNR will continue to investigate.